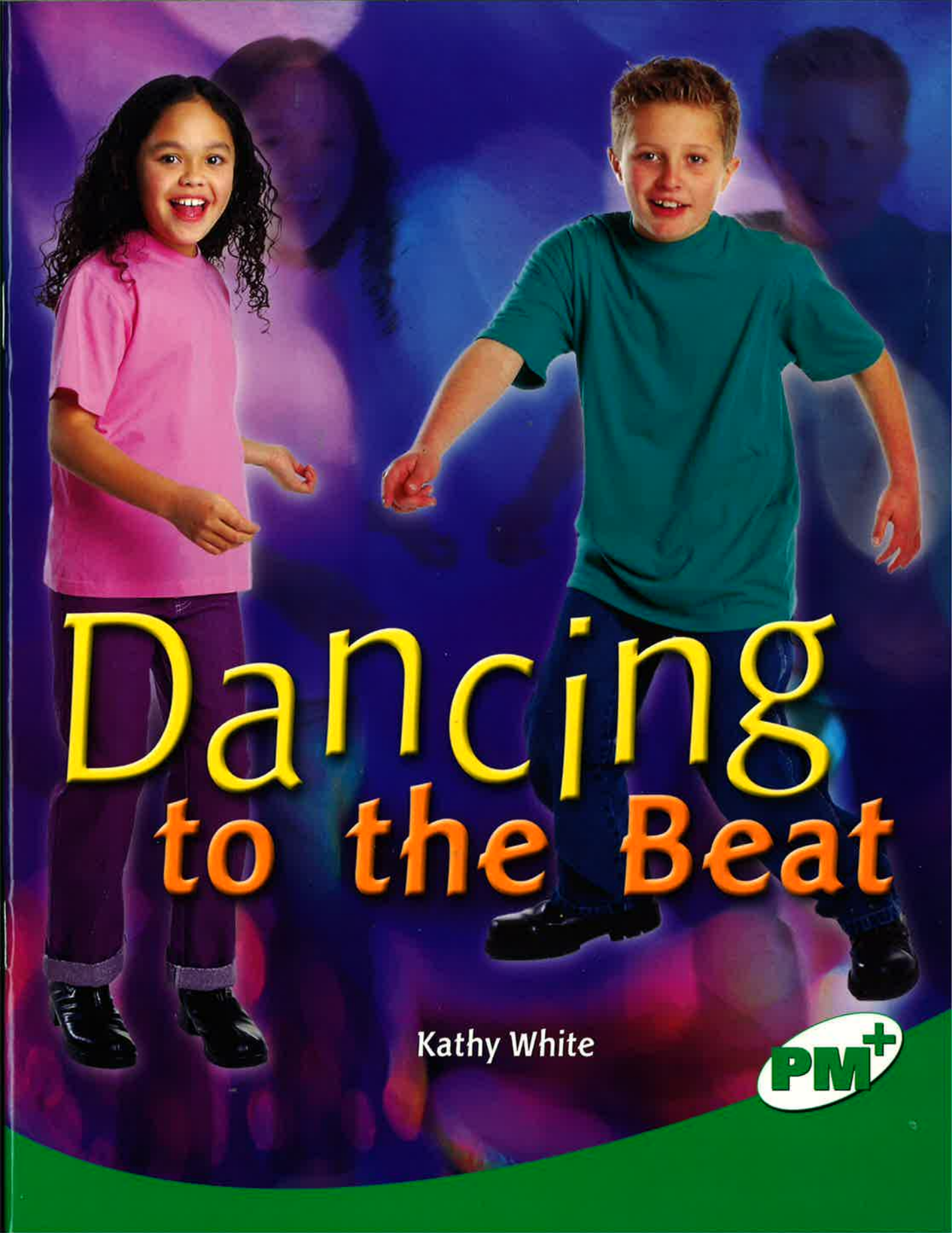

Dancing
to the Beat
Kathy White
PM+

# Contents



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CHAPTER 1  **Why Do We Dance?** ..... 4

CHAPTER 2  **Dancing Through Time** ..... 10

CHAPTER 3  **Strictly Spanish: Flamenco!** ..... 14

Try for Yourself ..... 15

CHAPTER 4  **Basically Ballet** ..... 16

Try for Yourself ..... 17

CHAPTER 5  **Choreography** ..... 18

Ann Dewey, Dancer and Choreographer ..... 18

CHAPTER 6  *The V8s Rev Up* ..... 20

Andrew, V8 Dancer ..... 20

CHAPTER 7  **Training to be a Dancer** ..... 22

GLOSSARY AND FURTHER READING ..... 24

WEBSITES ..... 25

INDEX ..... 25

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# Why Do We Dance?

Dance is one of the oldest and most creative ways of communicating. People can dance **solo**, in pairs and in groups. When people dance, they move their bodies to a rhythm or beat.





For thousands of years, people all over the world have danced. Dances celebrate important events as well as day-to-day life. Some dances tell stories, some communicate emotions, and others are for fun, fitness or entertainment.

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# Nature and Survival

In the days before supermarkets and refrigerators, people grew their own food. When they planted their crops, they performed special dances to encourage the crops to grow well. After they picked the crops, they danced at harvest festivals to give thanks for their food. Some of these dances are still performed today.



▲ American Indian people performed 'rain dances' in times of **drought**.



▼ Japanese dancers take part in Sakura festivals to celebrate the beginning of spring. Streets are lined with cherry trees in blossom — Japan's national flower.

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# Family Events

People dance at births, **funerals**, weddings and **coming-of-age** celebrations. The dances are a way to tell stories and pass on traditions. They bring families closer together.

▼ At 13, a Jewish boy becomes an adult. Men and boys dance together at a traditional coming-of-age celebration called a bar mitzvah.





▲ In Tibet, a dancer in a special costume performs at a funeral.



◀ The haka

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## War and Peace

New Zealand Maori **warriors** used to perform a war dance before and after a battle. Dancing helped them to strengthen their muscles, practise their fighting techniques, and to fight as a team. The dance was called the 'haka'.

The haka still survives today and is performed by the New Zealand rugby team before international competitions.

▼ The New Zealand rugby team





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◀ Australian Aboriginal dancers

## Religious Beliefs

Some dances are about religious beliefs. Australian Aboriginal dancers decorate their bodies in patterns with **ochre**. They perform their dance to make contact with the spirits, the land and their ancestors.

## History and Culture

Many countries around the world have their own special dances. Some dances are very old. They are an important way of keeping a country's history and **culture** alive.



◀ Irish dancers dress in costumes decorated with traditional designs. Their **jigs** and music tell stories from Irish folklore and history.



A traditional dancer from Bali. ▶